

JUL 20 2007

Ravalli County Commissioners

Dear Ravalli County Commissioners;

			July	18 th	2007
--	--	--	------	------------------	------

I am writing this letter to express my strong opposition to the Lost Horse Mine and Reclamation Plan, proposed to start operations this Fall of 2007 by Ranger Chuck Oliver of the Darby Ranger Station in coordination with Dave Ohnstad of the Ravalli County Road Department.

Activation of this mine will effectively destroy this unique recreational area forever, lower the land value of all who live on Lost Horse Road and create economic loss for Ravalli County. You can not grow back rock, you can not put back talus fields, you can not mitigate the danger of the mining operation to recreational climbers, or wildlife impacts, you can not mitigate the noise, vibration, diesel fumes, impacts to home owners that live on the road where heavy truck traffic will run, from an active October to April, 10 year-or-more mining operation of the size and scope proposed by Ranger Oliver and Dave Ohnstad.

I lived in Missoula County for 4 yrs where I got my Ph.D. at the UM and have lived in Ravalli County for the last 10 years. As a climber I have always had good relations with the Forest Service on a wide range of climbing and recreational issues in the Bitterroot National Forest. I have worked closely with rangers in the Stevensville and Hamilton offices on climbing issues over the last 10-15 years. In my working life, as a scientist, I manage a large group (18) and am co-author on many peer-reviewed scientific publications. I choose to study, raise a family and work in Montana for one reason: the scenic and recreational mountain environment of the Bitterroot. I have had many offers to live and work in other places. What has kept me here is the scenic and spectacular Lost Horse Canyon. Lost Horse Canyon is a unique, one-of-a-kind recreational area. I go to Lost Horse Canyon on average of 60 days a year to climb and recreate. The climbing at Lost Horse is the best in the State of Montana. No other location in the State of Montana has the density of climbs, quality, ease of access, height of cliffs and overall abundance of climbing. The Lost Horse Mine Plan proposes active mining October through April for 10 years or more. Climbing at Lost Horse is best between the months of October to May where on cold days the sun warms the south and west faces of the cliffs above the gullies of the old, abandoned quarry. Rubber climbing shoes work best when the rock and air temperature are in the low 40s Fahrenheit. During the months of June to October it is too hot at Lost Horse, the rubber greases off the rock, and if climbers do go climbing, they go very early in the morning and leave before the sun hits the west faces. Because of the radiant heat generated by the Lost Horse cliffs a rain shadow exists there. When it is raining, snowing or cold in the Bitterroot Valley, the cliffs at Lost Horse Crags are often dry and warm. The rain shadow at Lost Horse allows us to climb all year round there. Because of the unique weather, rock and location, Lost Horse Canyon is Montana's best climbing location. Operation of the Mine will effectively halt all climbing activity at Lost Horse. The current access trails, which start in the abandoned quarry bottom to access the cliffs above, have been in use since 1978. In the mid 1990's Rick Torre and myself gave Rangers Bill Goslin of the Stevensville Office, Mary Laws of the Darby Office and another ranger of the Hamilton Office a tour of those trails. As Rick Torre reminded me, Mary Laws

told us that we had to have an EIS done before any improvement of the two climbing access trails could occur, which included our request to put in water bars on those trails to control erosion. That day we negotiated a verbal agreement such that minor repairs (no water bars) on the trails could be done as long as we kept it low key, made no public announcements nor organized any large trail repair crews. We have been operating in accord with that verbal agreement since that day, with minor improvements made by random individuals over the last 10 years. My question is if we were told that we needed an EIS before trail improvement (water-bars) could occur, why is an EIS not required in order to operate this mine for the next 10-20 years or more? A full mining operation has much more impact than two small, sketchy, steep climber trails that access the cliffs above. These two small trails will be wiped out by expansion of the footprint, as presented in the Plan, during operation of the Lost Horse Mine.

The Lost Horse Mine Plan also proposes lowering the old quarry floor 100 feet vertically down and across the current old quarry footprint. This will bring the level close to that of the Lost Horse Creek level less than 100 feet away. Bull trout, native west-slope cutthroat trout are in Lost Horse Creek. These sensitive species will be negatively affected by this mining operation.

Climbers will not climb on cliffs above where an active mine is operating. The vibration and noise traveling through the rock, through the ground and up the cliff faces and gullies will make it too dangerous to climb. The noise and vibration will cause rocks to loosen and fall off the cliffs. We know these cliffs better than anyone and we are positive that this will be the case. The access trails up the gullies are also very steep and filled with talus. Mining vibration will cause rock in these gullies to rain down. Climbers know this because we are in these gullies, on these cliffs all the time, hiking these approaches with regular frequency. Climbers are extremely sensitive to rock fall and will avoid the area like the plague when vibration and noise from the mine begins. Nobody wants to get injured or die while hiking to or climbing on cliffs, especially immediately above an active, ongoing, 10-year or more mining operation.

The Lost Horse Mine and Reclamation Plan is grossly lacking on planning and details with regards to negative impacts to recreational users, comparative cost savings to the county, whether or not blasting with dynamite will or will not EVER occur, size and scope of the proposed operation, how much rock is actually there, safety to area residents from frequent 20 ton-hauling truck traffic, road reconstruction of the narrow, currently-in-poor-shape Lost Horse Road, noise, dust, conflicts with resident traffic, and wildlife impacts. Little to no mention is made of recreational impacts to fishermen, ATV users, hikers, bikers, skiers, bird watchers, and snowmobile riders and in particular, impacts to climbers. No mention is made of impacts to travelers to Lake Como, the most heavily used canyon in all the Bitterroot, which is over one small ridge to the south via the road and bridge adjacent to the proposed quarry operation. No mention is made of the many FS recognized and established campsites that people frequent just feet from the proposed quarry operation. No mention is made of the negative impacts to people traveling to the Twin Lakes basin further west of the proposed quarry on Lost Horse Road. Lost Horse Road now has more than 75 homes with extensive properties

and landscaping, all east and downstream of the proposed quarry. Absolutely no mention is made to the economic loss to these residents when heavy truck traffic and mining begins and operates for 10 years or more on this road. As a family man and father of two children, I would never buy a house or property on a road that had an active mining operation upstream of the property, where trucks, each carrying 20 tons or more of rock will operate 6 months out of the year up and down that narrow road for 10 years or more. Who in his right mind would buy property on this road when you have 20-ton trucks running once every 15 minutes on that road for 10 years or more? I have asked many people, "would you want a rock quarry going in up the hill on your road, operational for 10 years or more, frequent and random heavy truck traffic 6 months out of the year?" Nobody says, "yes" They all say "NO!"

The Forest Service says no environmental review is needed because the site is less than 5.0 acres, in fact, they say it is 4.9 acres in the Lost Horse Mine Plan. In the Lost Horse Plan, the proposed footprint is well over 5 acres, with goals to expand it far to the west and east of its current location. It is obvious to everyone outside of the FS and Road department that the 4.9-acre figure was picked to slide this under the EIS requirement.

No discussion is ever made of the cost savings of this rock or what rock/gravel costs are at other, closer, and easier to access rock quarries, public or private. A \$2-3 dollar figure was thrown out in the newspaper by Dave Ohnstad, but he provided no details, no itemized costs for road repair, hauling of the rock, processing, equipment, labor costs, potential conflicts (legal challenges), or county insurance costs. I have heard local rock and gravel pit owners and contractors say, "If it was so cheap and easy, don't you think we would have all been in there years ago?". In truth, I have heard that it is far cheaper to have quarries close to HWY 93 where no road rebuilding costs exist, transportation and processing costs are lower, private landowner conflicts are minimal and insurance costs are lower. Also, I have heard that the rock is harder in the currently operating and existing river bottom quarries, next to HWY 93, and therefore better for road surfacing. I have also heard that the quantity and quality of the Lost Horse rock is nowhere near as much or as good as Dave Ohnstad would lead us to believe.

Wildlife impacts are ignored in the Lost Horse Mine Plan. Lost Horse is the only place in the Bitterroot where wolverines have been tracked using the canyon to migrate. No mention is made of the negative effects of the Mine on sensitive trout species in the adjacent Lost Horse Creek, only 100 feet away from the proposed quarry operation. In addition, I have personally seen peregrines many times above and on the cliffs immediately above the quarry. Mountain goats also frequent the cliffs above. Lost Horse is a narrow canyon, with steep mountain walls rising on all sides, a place where three large drainages converge. The sound, the vibration of heavy earth-moving and crushing equipment, and dust and congestion from the mine will be deafening and overwhelming to anyone or any thing within 5 miles. Absolutely no mention is made in the Lost Horse Mine Plan of the economic loss to Ravalli County by loss and destruction of this unique, high-use recreational area.

The proposed Lost Horse mining operation will be a complete destruction of a unique, active recreational canyon area in the Bitterroot, let alone the best rock climbing location in the State of Montana. The Lost Horse Mine will send property values on Lost Horse Road plummeting. Many folks in Ravalli and Missoula Counties have said to me that the Lost Horse Mine will be more costly to run than the Road Department or FS would have anyone believe. The truck traffic from the mine will cause safety issues on that narrow, Lost Horse Road. In order to enlarge the road to accommodate the heavy truck traffic, at least 1 mile of residences will see loss of property. The economic loss of recreational dollars to the county will be substantial and felt throughout the valley. The FS will most likely be involved in litigation on the Lost Horse Mine. I am prepared to contribute financially to any legal challenge against the FS on this Lost Horse Mine Plan. Road rock or fill has to be and can be found elsewhere, where it is cheaper, easier to access and extract, and most importantly, where it does not have such a profound and negative impact on so many different people that live and recreate in Ravalli County. Please, for the sake of our kids ability to enjoy Lost Horse as we adults have, the future recreational growth of Ravalli County, the unique, one-of-a-kind world class climbing, and the spectacular scenery, please do not allow this Lost Horse Mining Plan to go forward. We cannot afford to lose this precious, high quality, high-use recreational area for shortsighted rock-fill and road gravel needs. Other sources for this material can, should and need to be found elsewhere.

Sincerely,



Steve Porcella, Ph.D.
129 Wyant Lane
Hamilton MT. 59840

Sent to: Ranger Chuck Oliver
Ravalli County Commissioners
Senator Max Baucus
Senator Jon Tester
Representative Rehberg
Governor Brian Schweitzer
Barry Paulson